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SOURCE Tekhnologiya Giãroliznogo Proizvodstva, V. A. Smirnov, 1948.

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REPORT ON V. A. SMIRNOV'S "TECHNOLOGY OF THE (WOOD, CELLULOSE,
AND VEGETABLE MATERIAL) HYDROLYSIS INDUSTRY"

[Figures are appended.]

This book was published by Pishchepromisdat (Food Industries Publishing House), Moscow, 1948; 364 pp, 13 roubles. Circulation of this edition was 5,000. Authorized by the Ministry of Higher Education USSR for use as a textbook in higher educational institutions in the field of food and nutrition.

The title of this book and the fact that it has been published as a manual for the food industry are somewhat misleading. While sugar, one of the main products of the industry in question, is traditionally a good product the industry has developed considerably since the principal and only product of the hydrolysis of sawmill waste was food sugar. The raw material is no longer wood or cellulose exclusively--hence, the new term "hydrolysis industry."

A considerable quantity of the sugar obtained by hydrolysis is fermented to alcohol and the alcohol obtained in this manner is used as the principal raw material for production of synthetic rubber in the USSR. Alcohol is also being used to an increasing extent as motor fuel in the USSR, and so alcohol rather than sugar is regarded as the more important product of the hydrolysis industry.

At present the Russian hydrolysis industry, which has the highest capacity in the world, is slated for expansion mainly because of the high demand for technical alcohol. In accordance with the postwar Five-Year Plan, the production of hydrolysis alcohol in 1960 will be eight times higher than before the war. This involves the construction of new plants having a production capacity of 7 million decaliters. In connection with this production, all byproducts will be utilized in conformity with the principle of total conversion, which is being applied at present. Total conversion, i.e., complete industrial utilization of all byproducts, is typical of the Russian hydrolysis industry and presupposes a rather high level of technological development in this field. A general scheme for conversion of conifer wood, which is the principal raw material at present, is shown in Figure 1.

- 1 -

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In connection with the construction of large plants that will utilize cotton hulls, the conversion of vegetable raw material (agricultural wastes, etc.) having a higher pentosan content is expected to become of increasing importance. A scheme for utilization of material rich in pentosan is outlined in Figure 2. The lignin gas generator fuel listed on both appended charts 1 dried by using the waste heat of power plant furnace gases. The final product (pressed lignin) is regarded as an excellent fuel for transport gas generators, but some lignin is burned on the spot at the lower plants attached to the installations where it is produced.

The Russian hydrolysis industry has a long history and tradition. The first attempts to produce edible sugar from starch date back to the 18th Century and hydrolysis of wood, cellulose, and straw was carried out early in the 19th Century. By analogy with the standard procedure for the hydrolysis of starch, sulphuric acid was originally used for the hydrolysis of wood and cellulose. The sulphuric acid method still remains the principal process used in Russia and has been developed to a considerable extent from the practical and engineering standpoint since the early beginning of the industry. The use of sulphuric acid is a distinguishing mark of the Russian hydrolysis industry and denotes a development largely independent of that which has taken place abroad.

Hydrolysis with concentrated sulphuric acid was quickly abandoned because of the difficulty of recovering the acid and dilute sulphuric acid was used instead. The weaker action of dilute sulphuric acid and other difficulties resulted in the fact that only hemicelluloses were hydrolyzed in the first semicommercial installation built in 1898 for the hydrolysis of wood. It took a long time before the process in its final form, involving the use of dilute sulphuric acid was mastered.

From 1920 - 1930, research on the hydrolysis of wood was intensified. Gradual hydrolysis of the same batch in the same autoclave with several successive portions of fresh acid doubled the yield of sugar, bringing it up to 38-42 percent of the weight of wood. From this, the percolation hydrolysis, first proposed by Iroshkina in 1920, was developed. The so-called pulsating hydrolysis, which involves rapid changes of temperature and pressure with a resulting effect somewhat similar to that occurring in the popping of corn, was developed next. This brought the yield of sugar up to 50 percent of the weight of dry wood with a sugar concentration of 3 percent in the hydrolysate and an expenditure of 100 percent sulphuric acid corresponding to 26-27 percent of the weight of sugar.

Systematic research on various methods and pilot-plant work were started in 1934, when experimental plants in Cherepovets (saw dust), Arkhangelsk (saw dust), and Verkhnedneprovsk (straw and other agricultural wastes) were built. The so-called gradual diffusion method based on the counter-current principle and involving circulation through several autoclaves was developed then. This procedure lowered the yield to 36 percent, due to the longer time during which the sugar stayed in solution, and raised the sugar concentration in the hydrolyzate to 4 percent. This method was never applied practically because of the excessive complexity of operation. The spraying of hot acid into an autoclave the charge of which had been heated to 180-185°C has been found to be of advantage, however, mainly because the useful volume of the autoclave (6 cubic meters) could be increased many times over that used in the pulsation method. Constant steam pressure is maintained in the autoclave. More efficient heat recovery from the hydrolyzate is possible. On completion of the hydrolysis, and prior to recharging the autoclave, the spent charge, which has been washed with hot water, is blown with steam into a cyclone. The average concentration of the hydrolyzate is approximately 3 percent and the yield of sugar about 45 percent.

- 2 -

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50X1-HUM

The use of sulphuric acid has certain advantages over that of hydrochloric acid. For instance, the hydrolyzate can be evaporated without neutralizing the acid (using the heat of the hydrolyzate) and furfural, turpentine, and methanol can be recovered from the vapor during the process. Neutralization is carried out with calcium hydroxide. After calcium sulphate has been filtered off, the solution, upon addition of superphosphate and ammonium sulphate, is an excellent growth medium for yeast. On the other hand, hydrochloric acid, although a superior hydrolysis catalyst, must be neutralized with sodium hydroxide, as a result of which the presence of Na ions would interfere with the activity of yeast. (One can neutralize with calcium hydroxide, of course, but the presence of calcium chloride presumably would have a still more deleterious effect on yeast). Hydrogen chloride cannot be removed by evaporation and some of it must be neutralized, but removal of the remainder of acid by means of ion exchange agents is conceivable.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on the production of a hydrolyzate, which can be fermented to alcohol easily and efficiently, hydrolysis with hydrochloric acid has also received close attention from Russian technologists, and considerable work on the subject has been done. The advantages of using highly concentrated hydrochloric acid (41-42 percent HCl) rather than dilute acid, which consist in the possibility of using low temperatures and drastically reducing the consumption of steam, have been realized.

Basing their work on foreign publications, which are regarded as incomplete, particularly the work of Bergius up to 1940, the Russians have further investigated the hydrochloric acid process from the point of view of complete utilization of byproducts. The production of crystalline dextrose, gas generator bricks, activated carbon, alcohol, and glycerine (the latter from impure sugar) can be accomplished on the basis of this process. Dextrose production from wood by the hydrochloric acid method is regarded as excessively complicated, however, and for that reason work on hydrolysis with concentrated sulphuric acid is being continued. The idea of combining the production of crystalline dextrose with that of phosphate fertilizers or ammonium sulphate, i.e., of reusing sulphuric acid after the hydrolysis for the decomposition of apatite or the synthesis of ammonium sulphate, seems to be of interest.

In the discussion of the hydrolysis industry, application of the products as fuels seems to be noteworthy. The use of gas generator lignin bricks has already been mentioned. In regard to the use of alcohol as a motor fuel, the author of the book makes the following comments. Alcohol is not used alone as a motor fuel, because the latent heat of evaporation is so high (205 kcal/kg for absolute alcohol as compared with 115 kcal/kg for gasoline) that heating of the air up to 100°C would be necessary. Notwithstanding the comparatively low boiling point (78.3°), the vapor pressure of alcohol at low temperatures is lower than that of gasoline, so that it is impossible to start a cold motor on alcohol.

However, by adding alcohol to gasoline the effectiveness of the latter as a fuel is improved. Notwithstanding the fact that alcohol has a lower combustion heat than gasoline, it is burned more completely and produces more heat than gasoline. Consequently, the efficiency of the motor is increased when alcohol is added to the gasoline. A gasoline-alcohol mixture is highly compressible and has very good antiknock properties.

A mixture of absolute alcohol with gasoline is very stable. Depending on the composition, the point of separation varies, but is lower than -40°C. If common alcohol of 95-96 percent C₂H₅OH content is admixed to the gasoline rather than absolute alcohol, separation into layers, especially at low temperatures, should be prevented by means of a stabilizer. As stabilizers, higher alcohols (7-10 percent by volume of the mixture of butyl alcohol, amyl alcohol, etc.), esters, or benzene are effective.

- 3 -

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In considering the relation of the hydrolysis industry to the petroleum industry, the use of furfural for the solvent treatment of lubricants must be mentioned. Furfural is also considered to be of great value in the USSR as a substituent for formaldehyde in the plastics industry, the latter aldehyde being in very short supply. Furfural replaces formaldehyde for use as a disinfectant and can be used as a preservative for fats and oils in the concentration of 1:1000.

The book is a manual which covers the technical aspects of an important industry. The following table of contents illustrates the scope of the book:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
A. <u>Production of Ethyl Alcohol, Yeast, Furfural, and Other Products From Wood by Hydrolysis With Dilute Sulphuric Acid</u>	
Chapter 1. Wood as a Raw Material for the Hydrolysis Industry	
General characteristics of the raw material	16
Structure of wood	17
Physical properties of wood	21
Chemical composition of wood	23
Chemical analysis of wood	28
Chapter 2. Preparation of Wood for Hydrolysis	
Requirements with regard to the raw material	32
Chopping and sorting mill	32
Transportation of wood to production	36
Chapter 3. Hydrolysis of Wood by Means of Dilute Sulphuric Acid	
General information	38
Chemical reactions in the hydrolysis of wood	39
Characteristics of the products of hydrolysis of wood	43
Kinetics of the hydrolysis of polysaccharides	44
Kinetics of the decomposition of sugars	54
Yield of sugar obtained by the batch method of hydrolysis	55
Yield of sugar obtained by the gradual and continuous methods of hydrolysis	67
Concentration of sugar in the hydrolyzate	69
Computation of the practical yield of sugar obtained by continuous methods of hydrolysis	70
Determination of the constants of the rates of hydrolysis of wood and of the decomposition of sugar	73
Equipment for hydrolysis and auxiliary equipment	76
The process of hydrolysis	82
Recovery of heat from the hydrolyzate	82
Disturbances in the work of the hydrolysis department	84
Chemico technological control of the process of hydrolysis	85
Scheme of operation of the hydrolysis department	86
Computation of the material balance of the hydrolysis department	88

- 4 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

50X1-HUM

Chapter 4. Preparation of the Hydrolyzate for Fermentation

General information	96
Neutralization of the hydrolyzate	96
Preparation of the milk of lime	104
Separation of the sludge	107
Cooling of the neutralized liquor	111
Separation of the colloids	113
Scheme of operation of the neutralization department	114
Computation of the material balance of the neutralization department	116

Chapter 5. Fermentation of the Liquor

Yeast	120
Bacteria causing damage in alcohol production	141
Chemistry of alcohol fermentation	144
Stages of fermentation	149
Peculiarities of the fermentation of wood liquor	150
Optimal conditions of the fermentation of wood liquor	151
Construction of fermentation vats	155
Methods of fermentation of wood liquor	157
Composition of the fermented liquor	164
Chemico-technological control of processes in the fermentation of wood liquor	166
Yields and losses of alcohol	167
Prevention of infection in the fermentation department	172
Technological scheme of the fermentation department	175
Computation of the material balance of the fermentation department	177

Chapter 6. Distillation of the Fermented Liquor and Rectification of Crude Alcohol

General information	179
Theoretical basis of distillation	181
Theoretical basis of alcohol rectification	190
Equipment for the distillation of fermented liquor	198
Equipment for rectification	222
Equipment for the rectification of fermented liquor	266
Disturbances in the operation of equipment for the rectification of fermented liquor	235
Losses of alcohol and measures for their prevention	237
Chemico-technological control of operations in the distillation equipment department	239
Calculation of the heat balance of a one-column installation for the distillation of fermented liquor	241
Calculation of the heat balance of a Barbet still for the rectification of fermented liquor	248
Computation of the material balance of the distillation equipment department	252
Storage of alcohol	253
Applications of alcohol	255
Applications of fusel oils	256
Applications of the ester-aldehyde fraction	257

- 5 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

50X1-HUM

Chapter 7. Production of Protein Yeast to be Used as Food

General information	258
Technological scheme of production	258
Preparation of the liquor for the cultivation of yeast	259
Selection of the species of yeast	260
Accumulation of yeast of a pure culture	261
Cultivation of commercial yeast	263
Separation of yeast from the fermented liquor	267
Pressing of yeast	270
Drying of yeast	271
Production of yeast paste	272
Packaging and labeling of yeast	272
Refrigeration and storage of yeast	272
Technical specifications for protein food yeast	273
Applications of yeast	273
Computation of the material balance of protein food yeast production	275

Chapter 8. Production of Furfural

Properties of furfural	279
Methods of furfural production	281
Technological scheme of furfural production	283
Applications of furfural, turpentine, and methanol	289

Chapter 9. Utilization of Technical Lignin

General information	291
Scheme of gas generator briquets production	291
Drying of lignin	293
Bricketting of lignin	293
Characteristics of lignin as a fuel	294

D. Production From Agricultural Wastes of Vegetable Origin of Xylose and Its Derivatives, of Ethyl Alcohol, Furfural, Activated Carbon, and Other Products by the Method of Hydrolysis With Dilute Sulphuric Acid

Chapter 10. Production of crystalline xylose

Characteristics of the raw material	297
Preparation of the raw material and its transportation to production	299
Hydrolysis of vegetable material with dilute sulphuric acid	299
Neutralization of the hydrolyzate	300
Purification and cooking (treatment and evaporation) of xylose syrup	300
Crystallization of xylose	302
Centrifuging after the first crystallization and treatment of the mother liquor	303
Applications of xylose	304

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

50X1-HUM

Chapter 11. Production of Furfural from the Effluent of Xylose Production	
General information	305
Technological production scheme	305
Yields and losses of furfural	307
Chapter 12. Production of Collectivit	
Methods of activated carbon production	308
Optimum conditions of collectivit production from technical lignin	310
Technological scheme of collectivit production	311
C. <u>Production of Crystalline Dextrose, Ethyl Alcohol, Yeast, and Other Products From Wood by the Method of Hydrolysis With Highly Concentrated Hydrochloric Acid</u>	
General Remarks	317
Chapter 13. Hydrolysis of Wood With Highly Concentrated Hydrochloric Acid	
Production of the hydrolyzate	319
Cooking (evaporation) of the hydrolyzate	324
Drying of carbohydrates	326
Inversion of carbohydrates	327
Chemical composition of the hydrolyzate	328
Preparation of the highly concentrated hydrochloric acid	328
Chapter 14. Neutralization and Purification of the Syrup and Production of Colorless Sugar	
Technological scheme	333
Neutralization of the hydrolyzate	335
Purification of the syrup	335
Condensation of the syrup	336
Crystallization of dextrose	336
Production of colorless sugar	344
Applications of dextrose	345
Appendix (tables)	346
Bibliography (117 references-97 Russian)	356
Table of Contents	360
<u>Figures follow.</u>	

- 7 -

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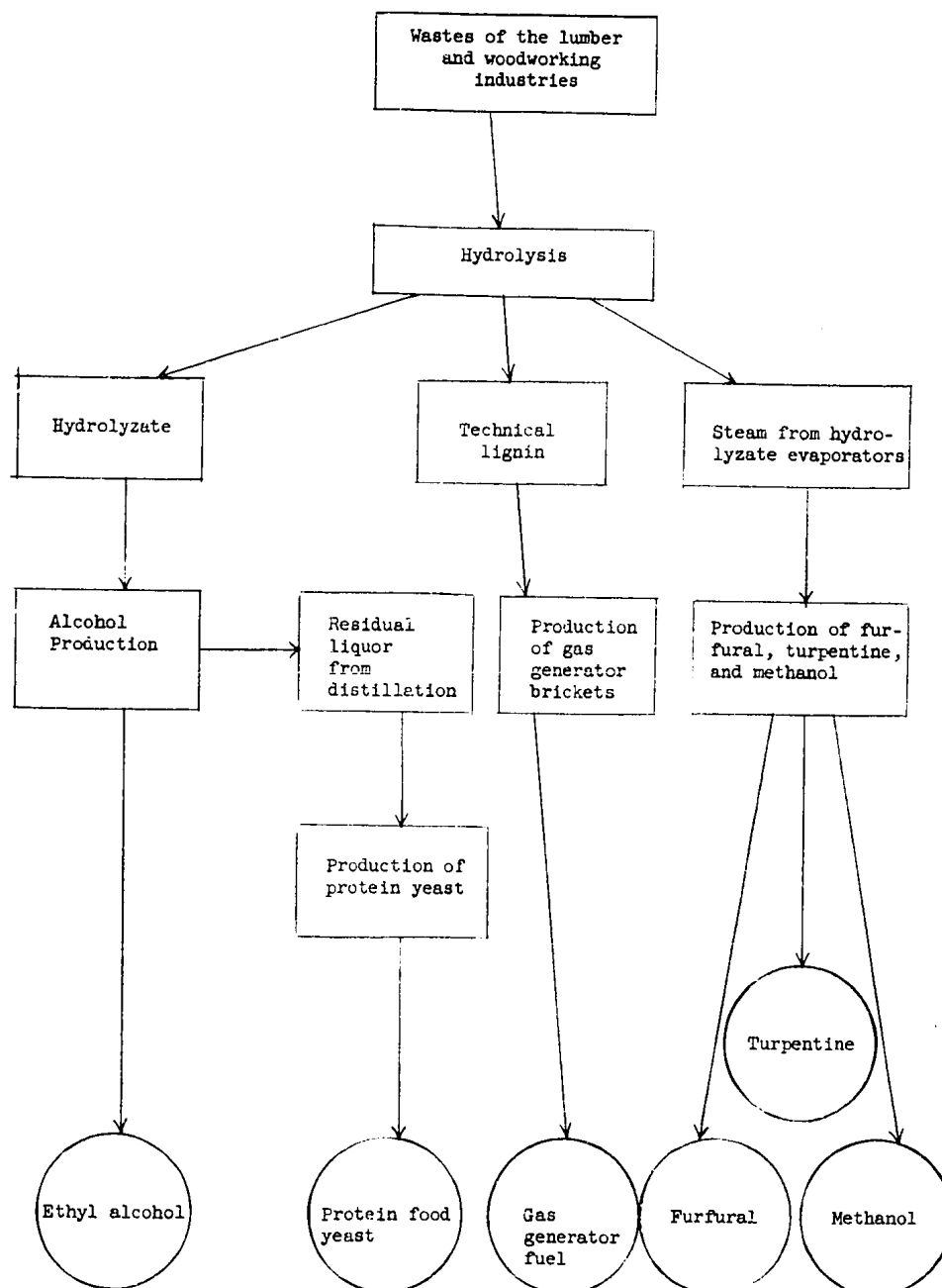
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50X1-HUM

Figure 1. General Scheme of the Total Conversion of Conifer Wood by the Method of Acid Hydrolysis



- 8 -

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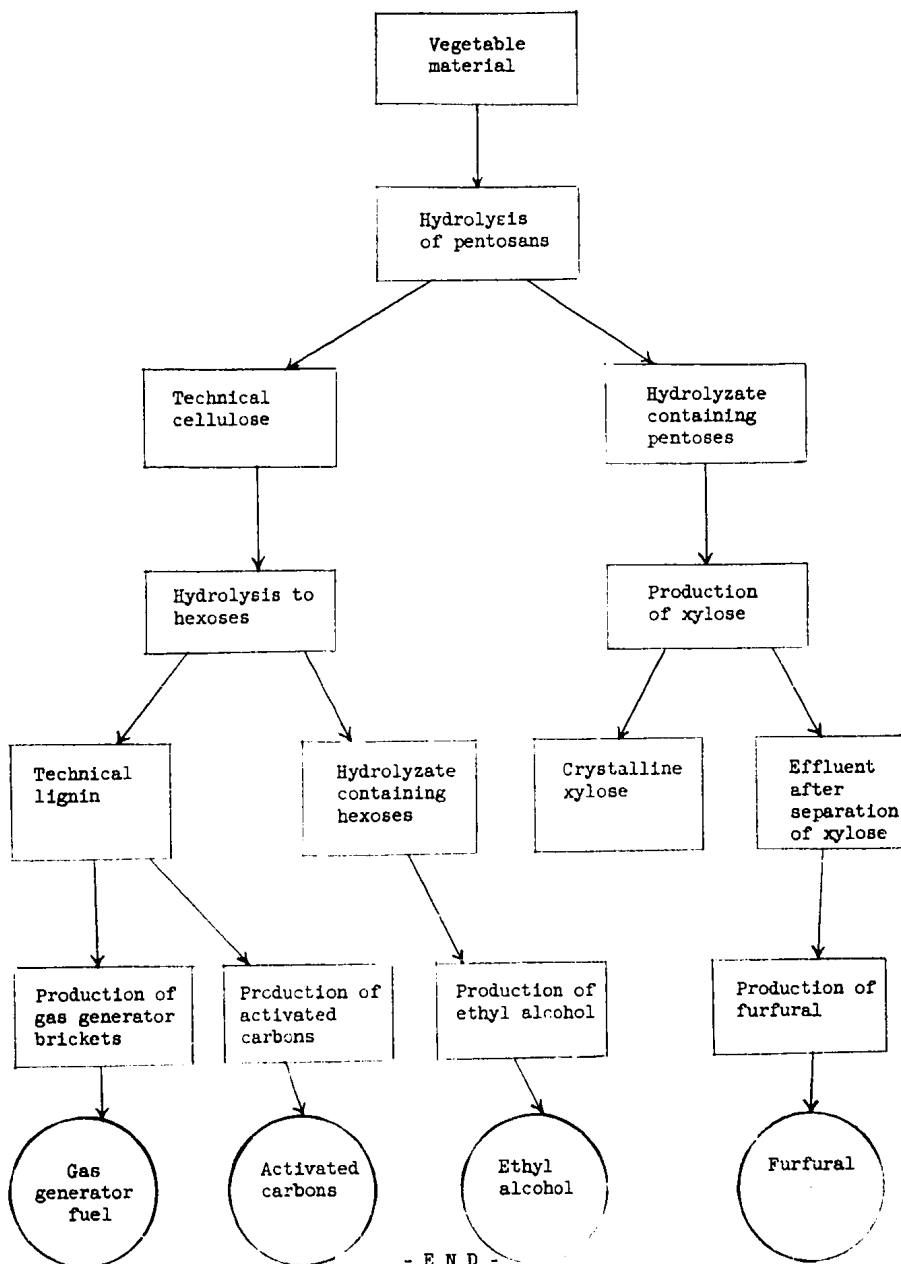
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Figure 2. General Scheme of the Total Conversion of Agricultural Wastes of Vegetable Origin by the Method of Acid Hydrolysis



- E N D -

- 9 -

CONFIDENTIAL

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